



Germany's Badische Weinstrasse

A trip over the border to the Black Forest to visit the typical "Straussi".

"You do it like this," explained the ten-year-old, as he handed me an apple crate from the stack just inside the shed. "We're going to make a table." Markus and his younger sister showed me the ropes, and soon we were ready to order dinner. Their parents had invited me along for an evening at the family's favorite *Strausswirtschaft*, one of the many wine growers' pubs to be found along the Badische Weinstrasse, Southern Germany's wine route. We were in the vineyards of Tuniberg, the smallest wine-growing area in the country. A beribboned broom was planted just outside the gate, and party lights draped the wooden fence. Children scampered across the grass among the make-shift tables.

My friends ordered for us, and we were soon tucking into thinly sliced smoked turkey; homemade bread; *Brägel mit Bibiliskäs* (potatoes sautéed with bacon and onions, herbed cream cheese alongside); and salads. The house wine was a Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir), and there was apple juice for the kids. Dessert was *Gugelhupf* and a portion of *Weincreme* (wine cream pudding) to share. Afterwards, we strolled through nearby vineyards, the lights of Freiburg twinkling in the distance.

Hundreds of wine growers' pubs are found across German-speaking wine regions, many of them in Baden, Germany's third-largest. They go by a number of names, variously spelled: *Straussenwirtschaften* shortened to *Straussi*, *Besenwirtschaften*, *Heckenwirtschaften*, and more. The concessions date back to the Middle Ages and to Charlemagne, who, around 800 AD, first allowed wine growers to sell some of the wine they produced. The practice later expanded to include food.

Some wine pubs in villages have restaurant-like dining rooms. Those in the countryside among vineyards and orchards are generally more rustic,

and often serve guests on trestle tables beside their barns. In the beginning *Strausswirtschaften* operated only in winter. Today, opening dates vary, with "high season" in summer and autumn. A true *Strausswirtschaft* is unlicensed, and must fulfill certain conditions: offer no more than 40 seats; be open just sixteen weeks per year; and serve only house wines and simple meals. A broom, rake or wheel decorated with colorful ribbons signals the place is open for business.

Typical menus include *Zwiebelwaie* (onion pies); sausages and sauerkraut; and seasonal fruit tarts and cakes. In spring, it's time for asparagus; in autumn, apple cider, *Schäufele* (smoked pork shoulder), sauerkraut and potato salad. Lighter offerings include Black Forest trout with *Gschwellti* (boiled potatoes). My personal favorite, though, is *Flammkuchen*, a thin, pizza-like base topped with smoky bacon, onions and cream, crispy and blackened around the edges. It tastes best served outdoors on a wooden plank, with a glass of Riesling, or in autumn, *Federweisser* (unfiltered new wine).

The Badische Weinstrasse meanders through all five wine-growing areas of Baden: Ortenau, Kaiserstuhl, Tuniberg, Breisgau, and Markgräflerland. Ortenau is known for its Riesling, while Markgräflerland is the land of Gutedel (Chasselas) and Ruländer (Pinot Gris). Weißburgunder (Pinot Blanc) is cultivated principally in Breisgau, Kaiserstuhl and Tuniberg. From late August to October, *Federweisser* joins the lineup. The wines are diverse in flavor, the product of Baden's warm, sunny climate and especially its varied soil types, which range from clay to limestone to granite to sand.

Detailed directory information in English is hard to come by, but two German-language pocket guides are updated regularly:



Photo by Tom Fakler

- Klaus-Jurgen Grosse's *109 Strausswirtschaften und Gutsschänken* covers *Straussi* between Basel and Karlsruhe. It has maps and photographs.
- *Besenbuch*, by Brigitte Jacobi, has a broader geographical reach, and includes five wine-producing regions in Germany and one in Switzerland. It has no maps.

Cycling and wine hiking trails crisscross the region, inviting leisurely exploration and *Straussi* discovery. The *Ortenauer Weinpfad* runs 120 kilometers from Gernsbach almost to Lahr.

The *Markgräfler Wiiwegli* is 81 kilometers long and connects Weil am Rhein with Freiburg. "Hiking without luggage" tours along the Black Forest's Westweg hiking trails are offered through Schwarzwald Tourismus, at: www.blackforest-tourism.com/



Anita Breland
is a writer and
photographer who
has lived in Basel
since 1998. She
enjoys sampling
local culture
and cuisine, and
sharing her explorations with readers.
anita@brelandcommunications.com